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SERVICE DETERMINES THE FIVE CENTRAL TEXAS MUSSEL SPECIES WARRANT PROTECTION UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today it has completed a status review for five central Texas mussel species - Texas fatmucket (*Lampsilis bracteata*), Texas pimpleback (*Quadrula petrina*), Golden orb (*Quadrula aurea*), Texas fawnsfoot (*Truncilla macrodon*), and Smooth pimpleback (*Quadrula houstonensis*) – and determined that they warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), however, their listing at this time is precluded by higher priority listing actions. The Service made this finding after a thorough review of all the available scientific and commercial information regarding the status of the five central Texas mussel species and the threats to the species.

The status review was undertaken in response to petitions submitted in 2007 and 2008 by WildEarth Guardians requesting that the Service list a wide array of freshwater mussels found in the southwest. On December 15, 2009, the Service published a 90-day finding in the *Federal Register* on nine Texas mussels that were included in the 2007 and 2008 petitions including the Texas fatmucket, golden orb, smooth pimpleback, Texas pimpleback and Texas fawnsfoot which suggested that listing the mussel species may be warranted and initiated a status review.

Information provided by the petitioner suggested that habitat destruction and modification threaten the five central Texas mussel species. Based on the best available scientific information and a thorough review of all information, data and peer review comments, the Service has determined that there is evidence indicating that the magnitude and imminence of threats impacting the five central Texas mussel species constitutes a threat to the five species throughout all or a significant portion of their ranges. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recently added these species to their state threatened list.

Over 50 mussel species are found throughout the State of Texas. “Mussels have significant economic and cultural value” said Gary Mowad, Texas State Administrator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “They serve as important messengers regarding the health of our waterways and rivers, acting as the ‘canary in the coal mine.’ The Service is committed to working with the State of Texas, private landowners, water users and others to conserve the five central Texas mussel species.”

The five central Texas mussels historically occurred in two or three river basins in central Texas, including the Nueces, San Antonio, Guadalupe, Colorado, and Brazos river basins. All five species have experienced substantial reductions in their range.

A copy of the 12-month finding and other information about the five central Texas mussel species is available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket Number [FWS-R2-ES- 2011-0079]. Supporting documentation used in preparing this finding is available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Austin Ecological Services Field Office, 10711 Burnet Road, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78758. Additional information on the five central Texas mussel species may be found at www.fws.gov/southwest/es/AustinTexas/ESA_sp_mussels.html.

Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions concerning this finding to the above address, or by contacting Gary Mowad, Texas State Administrator, by telephone at 512-927-3557; or by facsimile at 512-927-3592. If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), please call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.

The Service's priority is to make implementation of the ESA less complex, less contentious and more effective. The agency seeks to address the conservation needs of imperiled species before they require the protection of the Act, accelerating recovery of threatened and endangered species across the nation while making it easier for people to coexist with these species.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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